

TIME CHANGES EVERYTHING?

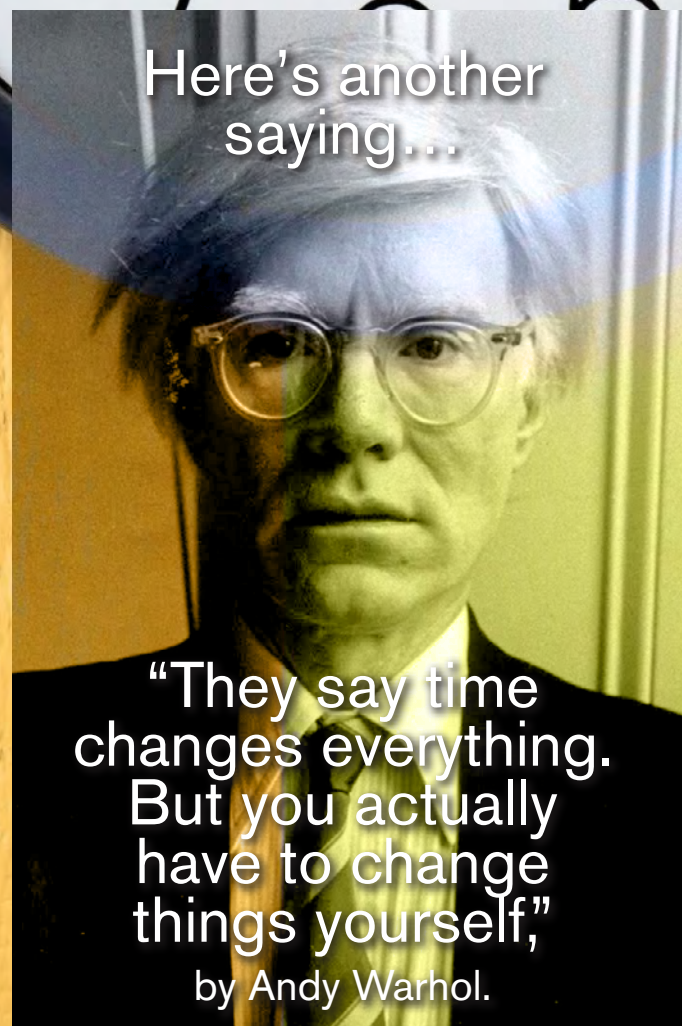
By Wayne Mahar

I think we've all heard this saying.



"Time changes everything,"
by Thomas Hardy.

Here's another saying...



"They say time changes everything. But you actually have to change things yourself,"
by Andy Warhol.

Which quote is more accurate, and what do these quotes have to do with severe weather safety? Let me explain...

Time does NOT change everything. You DO have to change things yourself. Here's proof. Although it's been four years since the tragedies at the Indiana State Fair and the Ottawa Bluesfest, weather related serious injuries and deaths continue.

Dateline Wood Dale, Illinois. August 2nd this year. One dead and a dozen seriously injured at Prairie Fest as a storm blew in causing a tent to collapse onto fairgoers.

24 hours later, Dateline Lancaster, New Hampshire. August 3rd. Two dead, a father and young daughter and many injured as a storm hits a circus causing another tent collapse onto fairgoers.

"The lawsuit claims that the businesses lacked reasonable and adequate emergency response plans that would ensure the safety of festival attendees in adverse weather."

That quote was taken from a Chicago Tribune article dated 8/12/2015 regarding the deadly Prairie Fest in Wood Dale, Illinois on August 2nd.

Note the phrase "adequate emergency response plans." This phrase doesn't just pertain to immediately before the storm hits. It also pertains to well before the storm hits when there is still time to do something. In both of these recent, tragic events, it appears there WAS sufficient warning, sufficient lead time to at least get people heading to a place of safety. The Lancaster, NH event had a Severe Thunderstorm Warning in effect for 22 minutes, issued by the National Weather Service. Reports on the Wood Dale event say the National Weather Service had issued a Special Weather Statement at least a half hour before the storm struck stating that strong thunderstorms with damaging winds and hail were heading towards the area.

It's the same story every year. A fair, a festival or a concert. 30,000 people attending or 30 people attending, the fact is many in the outdoor event and concert industry are still not properly prepared to face severe weather. Since the Indiana State Fair, I've had the opportunity to speak at several major event conventions such as the IFEA Convention & Expo and the Festivals and Events Ontario annual convention. I've moderated panel discussions on severe weather preparedness, run hundreds of event organizers through my Table Top severe weather exercise and written articles on severe weather preparedness. Unfortunately, weather related tragedies are still happening. In fairness, I believe in a general sense, we are slowly becoming better prepared for storms, but nowhere near enough. Mistakes are still being made and people are still getting seriously injured and killed. What do we do? Well,

first thing, you actually DO have to "change things yourself" or at least change the way you prepare for your outdoor event.

Although the peak of summertime severe weather season is past, it's never a bad time to review "proper" severe weather preparedness procedures. Start planning for next year. Your severe weather safety checklist if you will. To some of you reading this, these safety procedures may seem obvious, but please read them anyway. At the least they're a good reminder.

1. WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

First and foremost, you need a Severe Weather Plan. A proper severe weather safety plan should begin with long range planning, meeting weeks and even months in advance with all key people and discussing all possible severe weather scenarios. This includes everything from different types of "weather events" to short and long "lead times" for sending people home or sending them to predetermined locations.

2. KEY PEOPLE

Who are your "key people"? Law enforcement and security; Emergency Medical; your Public Relations personnel; your managers; the "Voice of your event"; the Announcer who is in constant contact with your guests; and your front office personnel. I can imagine for some of these folks, you are saying to yourself "Why would I have them at the meeting?" The answer will become clear later.

3. PLAN OF ACTION

You will want to discuss types of severe weather and decide what your "Plan of Action" is for each. There should be a difference in your planning between what to do when a tornado threatens vs. simple heavy rains causing localized flooding of the grounds. Decide which "types" of weather will require people moving, and by people I mean everyone from patrons to vendors. If the weather is that bad, where do you direct them to go? Designate buildings and shelters ahead of time.

4. THE WEATHER

Deciding on types of severe weather and contingency plans is generally the easy part. Now it gets tougher. For instance, WHERE are you getting your weather information from? WHO is responsible for monitoring all the latest weather, storm movements, watches and warnings? Did you hire your own private meteorologist to work just for you and your event, someone you can call 24/7 with questions and concerns, even just to call and say "I'm a little concerned, the sky seems to be getting dark to our west." A private weather company you hire works for YOU and is concerned about YOU and YOUR event. Government weather services

might, or might not be available to help you out when you call them. That's not their job, they don't have a commitment to you, or a stake in your event. Whoever is in charge of monitoring weather, are they constantly monitoring for sudden changes, or just occasionally? Assuming these issues are set, lets now deal with the potential for "increased danger!" What I'm talking about is actual severe weather approaching or hitting your venue at the same time you have 15,000 people watching your afternoon or evening concert at the grandstand. A ton of rowdy concert goers packed like sardines into the concert area and a severe thunderstorm warning or even tornado warning is issued for your area. Think Indiana State Fair, or more recently, three summers ago, the Rogers Samia Bayfest in Sarnia, Ontario Canada. Precision Weather Service monitored Doppler Radar and was on the phone continuously with the Festival Director tracking the severe storm movement minute-by-minute, which by the way came within five miles of the venue.

5. KEY PERSON

BEWARE! Do not mistake this for #2. WHO is THE key person at your event? Who is THE decision maker? In fast breaking weather with large crowds, you don't have time to find your managers, call a meeting and vote on what to do. You MUST have someone, in the know with the latest information who can make critical decisions *right now*. More so, all your key people, from Law Enforcement to the main office must acknowledge this individual as THE key decision maker so there are no questions or second guessing taking place in the midst of severe weather warnings. Many fairs, festivals and concerts do not have ONE key person in place, and this can be a real issue! Again, the Indiana State Fair. Seven lives were lost, and even to this day the argument continues between Fair officials, Law Enforcement and the band itself, Sugarland, as to WHO had final say on "calling the concert." Nobody made the call before the severe weather hit and after the fact, everyone points fingers at the other. Designate THE key person well ahead of time and make sure everyone knows who it is, and that key individual MUST have direct and immediate access to the latest information to make these key decisions. When signing contracts with the bands, promoters, private security, vendors or anybody on your grounds, make sure they know ahead of time WHO the real KEY decision maker is if push comes to shove.

6. KEEP THE MAIN OFFICE INFORMED!

If bad weather develops miles away, chances are fair officials and concert goers will hear about it. It will begin with a

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watch being issued, meaning the chance of severe weather, then could be upgraded to a warning, meaning severe weather is likely. Maybe there has already been damage an hour west of you. As patrons, vendors and even the bands themselves hear of this, they begin wondering and want to know more, and in most instances, they call your main office. *Keep your office personnel in the know.* Everyone from vendors to the band should be clear and reminded when they check in that any emergency decisions of any type come through your main office, possibly coordinated with Law Enforcement! If you have one or two key office personnel to field inquiries, all the better!

7. SPREADING THE WORD

If and when the time comes and a critical decision is made to move fair goers, vendors and workers, how do you spread the word? For your managers, your handful of key people, cell phone is typically the quickest. For most everyone else, this is where your Public Address Announcer becomes very important and the reason they should have been in on your initial severe weather plan meetings. They can help spread the word in an informed and clear way if THEY already

understand the procedures. Let them help you and help everyone with clear and concise information over the loud speakers.

8. EMERGENCY PERSONNEL

Make sure you, your managers, Law Enforcement/Security on the grounds and main office all have cell phone and/or two way radio contact with Emergency personnel. If there is a medical emergency, in severe weather or not, chances are it will come through Security or the Main Office.

9. CELL PHONES

In emergency times, everyone is on their cell phones, and normal cell phone signals could be an issue. If possible, try switching your cell phone(s) to analog. You may well find that old method less crowded.

10. AFTER THE STORM

The storm is over. Hopefully you have no serious injuries. Your safety concerns may not be done yet. While your remaining patrons and workers begin touring the grounds, watch for hazards, especially downed power lines or power cables running through water. Keep an eye out for building material and even furniture that

may have been torn apart, nails showing, and thrown around the grounds.

There are countless other rules and things to watch out for. These ten are just a start, but an important start in being able to “handle the pressure” for severe weather at your outdoor event.

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